10: d'Orleans--275 T-3 (1891-92) 1894 Laos
116, 609, 764

"In the evening some natives come and beg us not to enter the village near which we have halted, for a man has died there, and the funeral is being celebrated by a great feast, at which a good deal of tchoum tchoum will be drunk; our presence would be a constraint upon the guests."

10: d'Orleans--276 T-3 (1891-92) 1894 Laos
116, 563, 583, 591, 764, 793 Ethnic subgroups

"Marriages are easily made amongst the Khamouks; the young man's parents give sixty rupees to the girl's father and mother. After the marriage feast, the bridegroom sleeps one night in his father-in-law's house, then takes his wife home with him.

The dead are buried and not burnt; there is no priest, no religious ceremonies, but the master of the house cuts a fowl's throat and the mourners rub their knees with his blood. The men generally follow one stage in the bonzeries. (1) After a few months

1. I question whether this information does not apply more to the Laotians.

they are little bonze or Siang, then grand bonze or Tit ; a man who has not made one stage is Ba."

10: d'Orleans--319 T-3 (1891-92) 1894 Laos
116, 563, 583, 591, 764 Ethnic subgroups

[LSS: Among the Meo of Luang Prabang] "The marriages are arranged by the parents, a young girl being rated at 36 rupees and taken, as soon as she is married, to the house of her husband. The bodies of the defunct are interred three days after death."

23: Franck--277 T-2 (1924) 1926 Laotians
116, 764

" I had not seen a grave for days; the Laosians dispose of their dead like real Buddhists; the Miao pile heaps of stone over their corpses."

25: Brodrick--100 [2] S-3 (1939) 1948 Laotians
116, 535, 764, 782

"...the funerals in the Laos are gay ceremonies. When a man dies his body is covered in perfume-soaked sawdust piled into a hardwood coffin--the Laos is a land of fine, hard-grained woods--and the whole is placed upon a catafalque near the house. The bier is watched day and night by youths and maidens who sing songs, improvise poems, crack jokes, make love, and play musical instruments, while, from time to time, but not too often, the Buddhist monks come and read sutras of the Good Law. Cremation is not so strictly observed as in Cambodia, but most bodies are burned, at least in the towns and larger villages. After the incineration comes the Feast of the Appeasement of the Spirits. A covered altar is set up near the dead man's house, and on the altar are offerings to the manes or ghosts, offerings of frangipani flowers, of rice, of betel, of alcohol and of swords. And all night long, the women dance archaic-sounding , rhythmic measures to the tunes strummed out by an orchestra."

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moreover, the object of the utmost scorn on the part of the whole population, and their houses are relegated to points outside the muong, that is to say outside the city.

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No such practice exists in rural areas, and if a few girls grant their lovers great intimacies it is in the hope--a hope which is almost always realized--that marriage will be the result.

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Death, burial, cremation. In principle, Laotians are supposed to cremate their dead. In this they are obedient to the ancient traditions which specified this ceremony, but since cremation is a costly practice poor people are simply buried.

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In certain cases, as in deaths resulting from dysentery epidemics, from childbirth, from suicide, etc., the bodies are thrown into the river or its tributaries.

Laotians have no cemeteries enclosed by walls or barriers. A corner of the forest near the muong or village is reserved for this use and serves as a last resting place for those of the inhabitants who cannot be cremated or should not be thrown into the water. There, at the foot of the trees and in their shade, repose those adults and adolescents whose families did not even have means to buy the ritual cremation firewood, and also the children who never underwent the operation of "cutting the forelock" (1).

[881]

(1) This operation takes place at the age of thirteen and marks the transition from childhood to adolescence. It is the sign of nubility.

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When it is to be buried, the body of the dead person is placed in a sort of coffin made of ax-hewn planks which are usually poorly joined and covered with colored paper burdened with ornamentation. Sometimes a mat is used, in simpler fashion, or else lattices made of split and crushed bamboo stalks like those which form the floors of houses. The whole is tied together with rattan or with bamboo bark.

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This is the lot of destiny's outcasts. After a few family ceremonies and a feast given in the dead person's home [201]--the magnitude of which ceremonies and feast vary depending on the dead person's station in life and his family's resources--the bonzes, accompanied by a few pupils, come and recite the funeral orisons.

The bonzes are not supposed to look at the body during their prayers, and they hold up a screen called Talapat to hide their faces.

Gifts from the family serve as payment for the bonzes. When the prayers are over, flowers and wax candles are added to the gifts. The body is then raised on the shoulders of four pallbearers of good-will and taken to the cemetery, where there are a few ablutions and where the bonzes recite the last prayers before the burial. 764 792

When all is done the persons present take turns throwing branches, earth and stone into the grave, in the belief that these things will preserve the deceased from contact with wet soil and the teeth of animals. The grave, comparatively shallow, is dug two sok (.9 meter) deep for adults and a half sok (.65 meter) deep for children and adolescents. When the cavity has been filled with earth and well tamped down with the feet, the persons present withdraw and all is over forever.

No worship will be practiced for this tomb, and it will soon disappear under a thick blanket of vegetation. Relatives sometimes return, however, after a rainfall if the ground happens to have settled slightly on the very spot of the grave. They then fill up the tomb and build a sort of tumulus above it with flat stones or heavy round rocks.

The custom of throwing into running water the bodies of persons who had died as a result of certain diseases, generally of an epidemic character, used to be practiced in Laos before our arrival there. The inhabitants had no concern for the fatal consequences which such a procedure might have on public health. Since our arrival in the land an absolute prohibition has been issued against throwing any corpse into the watercourses. Nowadays the people are content merely with simulating this custom and with interring bodies after a pretended immersion. 766 744

[202] When the family of the deceased is wealthy or even well-to-do, cremation is the standard procedure. This ceremony is not performed immediately after death is pronounced, but may often be postponed for more than a month either to enable relatives to come from a distance, or to await the settlement of a pending lawsuit, or else the arrival of the fire sent by the sovereign if the deceased is a prince, an official or a man of a certain rank. Wealthy families postpone the date of cremation out of ostentation, for the interval between death and cremation is supposed to be filled with feasts, celebrations and amusements of all kinds which are put on almost continuously for the bonzes, relatives, friends, neighbors and [554] 764

764 passersby and which entail great expenditures.

The procedure in cremating bodies is practically the same throughout all of Laos, except for a few matters of detail peculiar to certain tribes and localities.

After death the body undergoes several preliminary operations, these being the ablutions, placing the funeral offering destined for the genii of the beyond in the dead person's mouth, drying the body and depositing it in the bier. The Laotian funeral offering recalls the ancient Egyptian custom which survived among the Greeks and [554] Romans under the name of obolus for Charon. In Laos this is a coin--a tical or a rupee--or a strip of silver or gold rolled into a cylinder on which the bonzes have used a sharp instrument to engrave certain sacred formulas and the word Arahang twice repeated, which in mystical language signifies worthy of honor, saint, exempt from all carnal desire, etc.

If cremation is to be postponed for any length of time the body is dessicated by means of mercury, which is introduced through the mouth so as to clean out the viscera completely, empty the intestine and prevent putrefaction. The procedure is completed by fumigating with aromatic plants and bark before the body is deposited in the bier. When the latter ceremony is over, the joints of the coffin are carefully luted with a special paste. Then until the time of cremation the casket is placed on a rather high catafalque which is covered with a roof and situated either in a [203] pagoda, in the dead person's home or in that of one of his close relatives.

There follows below the description of a funeral ceremony, all the phases of which were witnessed by the author. It will enable the reader to gain quite an exact idea of what cremation is like in Laos.

As soon as the death was made known, the bonzes from both pagodas of the Muong (1) came to the dead person's house in order to

(1) Here we refer to the Muong of Pak-Lay, capital of the province of Outhai-Thani (kingdom of Luang-Prabang). The deceased was the Tiao-Muong or head of this province, and was more than eighty years old when he died.

recite the litanies prescribed by the rites, and to see that a wall of the house was knocked down on the side of the rising sun. A bamboo staircase was built the entire width of the opening to give access to the room in which the body was to be displayed.

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The members of the family and the local officials went ahead with the ablutions and last toilet of the deceased. They wrapped the body in a shroud of white cotton material, and it was then placed temporarily on a mattress surrounded by green branches, flowers and a large number of yellow wax candles which were kept constantly lit and replaced as necessary.

A shed was built in the garden of the house to serve as a kitchen, for it would be necessary to prepare various foods--rice, cakes, etc.--both day and night without any respite. This food would be offered to all comers--relatives, friends, neighbors and even passersby--up to the day of cremation.

Visitors soon began to stream in, and no one arrived with empty hands. Everyone brought an offering proportionate to his means. Some brought a bouquet of flowers or some fruit, others brought pieces of cotton cloth, wax, firewood, rice, pork or buffalo meat, brandy, fish, etc.

Grief took up very little of the time of the dead person's relatives and friends, for the latter quickly busied themselves with keeping their guests occupied, treating them well and being in several places at once so that the guests would lack for nothing. No sadness, moreover, was to be seen among the visitors who arrived in great hordes to profit by the windfall and take part in the funeral feasts now being prepared.

[204] In their Pythagorean philosophy, the Laotians regard death much as any other of the vital functions which normally participates in transformations of matter, as for example conception and birth. In addition to this they are fervent disciples of Epicurus without realizing it, and love life in all its forms for the pleasures which, in spite of its brief span, it holds for individuals who can limit their needs and moderate their desires. Although they dread death during their years of youth and virility, this is not because they are afraid of it but mainly because they see in it an end to the many pleasures of life. What is more, they are old hands at finding pretexts for enjoying such pleasures and at discovering all possible propitious occasions for organized rejoicing.

Funeral ceremonies are celebrations in the same way as marriages, assumptions of garments, births, cutting children's hair and the other public festivals which occur regularly each year at fixed times. In Laos everything ends in libations, songs and feasts, with unfettered merriment and a profusion of flowers and cloth materials whose

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colors are bright and harmonious. It is during these days of rejoicing that the first amorous intrigues often spring up between young people which, generally speaking, end in marriage.

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Preparations for the funeral celebration went on, and dusk had not yet fallen when music and singing began to be heard and plates of food were passed around, as well as jars full of rice brandy.

Immediately after the death, men went to the forest to select the dead, but not decaying, tree whose trunk was to serve for making the coffin. Others prepared the pedestal on which it was to be placed and the roof which would surmount it.

The coffin was finally finished. Trapezoidal in shape, with the base uppermost, it rested on a wooden pedestal decorated with carvings.

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The roof placed above it was copied from the roofs of pagodas. The frame was made of bamboo lattice covered with glued calico, and the whole was ornamented with gold paper cutouts, streamers and multicolored cotton floss.

[205] The body was sealed in its coffin, where it rested on a bed of aromatic branches and leaves. It was fully dressed and surrounded by bedclothes. A sliding cover was dovetailed into place, and all joints sealed with an indestructible caulking compound made from lime, clay, albumen and paddy husks. [Illustration alongside text here]

The catafalque stood in the middle of the room, one of the walls of which had been removed, as we have seen. It was surrounded by flowers, green branches, lighted candles and stick incense perfumed with powdered benzoin.

In the course of the next four days the province bonzes and officials arrived, and all recited the ritual prayers in Pali around the catafalque without understanding anything of what they said but scrupulously observing the consecrated rhythm and intonation.

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In the meantime a funeral pyre had been built on the sandy bank of the Mékong, left bare by the low waters, using about three [206] steres of dry wood which had been impregnated with resin, wood oil and kerosene.

Solidly held in place at the side by six heavy stakes of green wood, the pyre was surmounted by a high canopy or rectangular pavilion, the roof of which rose in tiers and was covered with flowered cotton cloth and decorated with gold paper garlands, cutouts and many-colored streamers.

This pavilion, supported by four posts decorated in the same taste, would presently serve to shelter the coffin.

149: Reinach--155a G-3 (no date) 1901 AMI Indochina
Laotians AM8

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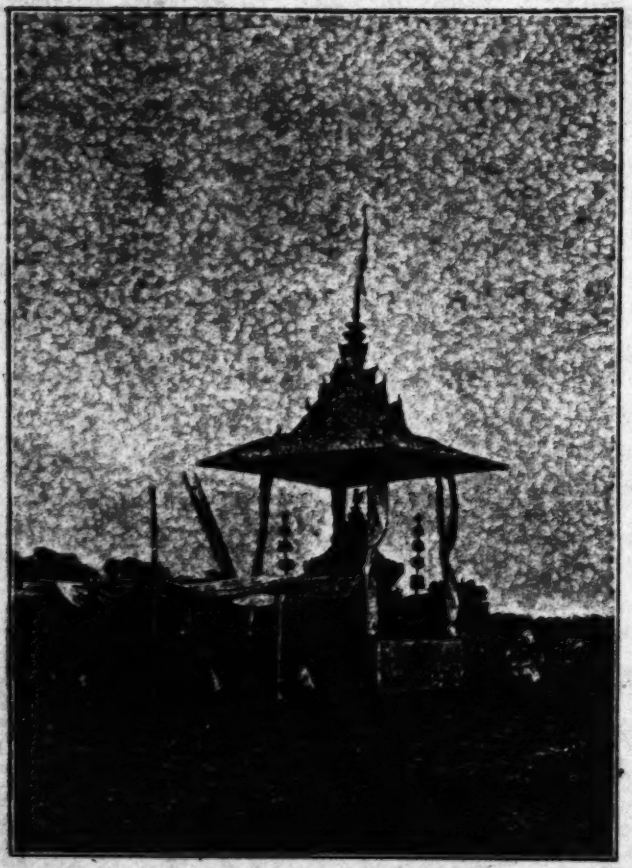

Fig. 51 /p. 205/ Catafalque ready for cremation, in Nong-Khay.

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Ever since the death, singers and improvisers of both sexes accompanied by volunteer musicians had recounted the merits, qualities and exploits of the deceased at great length and with emphasis before a numerous audience which remained attentive and never grew tired. They boasted of his good deeds, listed his particular habits and tastes and enumerated his many children and grandchildren.

They dwelled with great satisfaction on the intimacies which he had taken with the fair sex up to quite an advanced age, and in support of their remarks showed brightly illuminated drawings painted on long streamers of glazed calico. These drawings, as much by the truth of the attitudes shown as by their outrageous realism, were the joy of the spectators. Both children and adults roared with laughter as they listened to the highly spicy commentary of the improvisers.

A curious fact was that this exhibition did not occasion any obscene or even suggestive gesture on the part of the audience.

[532] [792]

The bonzes, who are the only art students in this country, are the ones who color these pictures. If published in our own land, the latter would certainly call down all the rigor of the law on their author.

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The day of cremation finally came, and the funeral proper began.

One of the sons of the deceased first set free two pairs of partridges and turtledoves, pet birds which he had had. The poor creatures were unaccustomed to flight and refused to leave their cage, but then beat their wings and clumsily escaped to a perch a few meters above ground on one of the trees [207] in the garden. A trail of ashes was spread all around the fence surrounding the house of the deceased in order, as popular belief has it, to prevent his spirit from escaping into the nearby region and tormenting the living.

[175]

A solid bamboo stretcher which twelve hardy men would carry on their shoulders was placed on the ground to await the catafalque. Attendance was heavy, and people of all ages came from a distance. They wore their holiday clothes with vivid, light and iridescent colors. They wore flowers in their ears and hair and carried multicolored streamers, wax candles and sticks of incense in their hands.

[292]

The members of the family, the officials of the Muong and the bonzes were also there in force.

The catafalque was carried from the house by hand and put down on the stretcher, which the porters then raised to their shoulders. At its base, near the feet of the deceased, was fastened a strip of calico

764 some forty meters long folded across its width until it was the size of a man's hand (with thumb and little finger spread). The strip was unrolled ahead of the coffin and was held by the youngest of the dead person's sons, who led the mourning. Then the bonzes, relatives, officials and best friends of the deceased took positions on each side and held on to the strip with one hand, as we would hold on to pall-bearers' cords. Thus constituted, the procession set off ahead of the coffin, drawing it along in a manner of speaking.

Tom-toms, gongs, cymbals, clarinets and the Laotian organ were heard during the processional, as well as songs and improvisations. When it reached the funeral pyre the procession circled it three times and deposited the coffin on it.

The spectators then took up positions under sheltering bushes, in shady spots or even in full sunlight, depending on their rank. All was in readiness to light the fire, which was to be provided by the Governor of the province, a delegate of the king of Luang-Prabang who is the "master of life" (1), for the deceased was a high official.

643 (1) The king of Luang-Prabang bears the title Tiao-Tsi-Vit, master of life.

[208] One important rite still remained to be performed; the last ablutions of water and brandy on the face, chest and hands of the body.

Then men climbed up on the pyre and removed the canopy of the catafalque, leaving the bamboo frame showing through the torn wrapping. They broke the lid of the coffin into splinters with great ax blows and thus exposed the body of the deceased, which exuded such a strong odor that all the spectators on the leeward side fell back.

The final toilet took place at this time. The men who do this work absorb such quantities of brandy to drive off miasmas and stimulate their own courage that their gestures and merriment, at such a time and place, would seem to us to be out of place. But here things 764 are not seen in the same light, and the gesticulations of all these folk 526 armed with axes and various containers and their grotesque attitudes around the open coffin merely stimulate the spectators' joy. The 527 songs and music had not ceased, and wrestling matches and animal combats were about to take place. The wrestlers took the measure of one another and came to grips with their hands flat open, while the

764 526 527

boxers pummeled one another with their fists. Their hands were smeared with a mixture of oil and soot so that they would leave a mark wherever they hit. The tilters were hot and eager, but did not greatly hurt one another, for their chief effort was to attract attention by means of gestures and plastic attitudes which would impress the girls and women with their supple, nervous and muscular bodies, shining like bronze under the sun because of the sweat which the effort of fighting brought on.

764 527 273

Combats between buffaloes followed these amusements, then cocks were brought on and the whole audience crowded around. Passions rose to a fever pitch in the whole mass of spectators, who had been imbibing brandy freely. Ironic clamors rained down on the men who had let themselves be beaten and whose faces were smeared with black on their return, while enthusiastic shouts greeted the victors. In spite of all the excitement, the sun, the heat and the brandy, the whole mass of people remained quite moderate and the festivities [209] [Illustration] [210] [Blank page] [211] always kept a gay and gracious air. The enthusiasm for the fighters, the shouts and the bravos only lasted for a moment, and all of them, both lucky and unlucky, were sponged, given drink and cherished with equal solicitude so that they soon forgot their momentary rivalry.

764 857

Children of both sexes then approached the pyre. They had all fastened their sampots and skirts in view of what was to happen next. Sacks were brought which were full of copper coins, to which a few silver coins had been added. Members of the family of the deceased then climbed up on the pyre and threw this small change broadcast into the horde of children. An indescribable tumult followed, accompanied by sharp cries. There was quarreling and fighting, and many little pairs of hands could be seen grabbing for the same copper coins. All of them would have liked to get the few white coins.

The parents and older people watched the coin hunt, which reminded them of the time when they were children and at the same time reminded them of the name of a dead man whose family had been generous to them once in similar circumstances.

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Now all the ritual ceremonies had been accomplished and it remained only to proceed to the last one: setting fire to the pyre.

Stiff lengths of rattan were attached to the four corners of the catafalque and fastened to the ground with stakes. Rockets slid along the lengths of rattan, and when the time came they would shoot up and supposedly light the pyre. In reality this is only a

149: Reinach--158a G-3 (no date) 1901 AMl Indochina
Laotians AM8

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Fig. 52 /p.209/ Preparing for a cremation.

"symbol" and the last vestige of an ancient usage, for the rockets can only set a few handfuls of straw afire. The wives and children of the deceased, all in great mourning costume, that is to say entirely clothed in white cotton goods, came and prostrated themselves before the Governor of the province, presented him with a platter of flowers and wax candles and asked him whether the King, "the master of life," had given permission for the cremation to take place and whether, for this purpose, he had sent "fire" from Luang-Prabang.

The Governor gave the fire to the dead man's relatives and then, in giving permission to cremate, he delivered an address which may be translated as follows:

[212] "The Tiao-Muong of Pak-Lay has been a good and just man during his life. He has never committed perjury. We may hope, together with his numerous family, that his Phi (soul) will be taken by the Thévada (angels) to the Spaces and there be presented to the holy Buddhas, Phra-Pouthi-Tiao, Phra-Tama-Tiao and Phra-Sang-Kha-Tiao, who will take him with them to Paradise to stay for a while. Then, at the time of rebirth, his Phi will again be incarnated in the body of a just, good and happy man who will have all the goods which are to be desired and a numerous progeniture."
[Illustration here]

The songs and music stopped during this speech, but they began again with new zest when the Governor of the province approached the pyre and set fire to the four corners. He was immediately followed and imitated by the family, the bonzes, the officials and the spectators. All without exception insisted on contributing fire, either with wax candles, resinous torches, dry bamboo or firebrands, or else with whole boxes of matches [213] or even with mere handfuls of dry grass which they had uprooted.

A thick, suffocating black smoke reeking of kerosene and resin rose up and enveloped the catafalque, and then a few tongues of flame shot forth. The evening wind was beginning to be felt and cleared the smoke somewhat. The flames grew hotter and finally hid the catafalque. A backward rush began, for the heat was far too intense and forced the spectators to move away from the [Illustration here] pyre. Only a few men armed with green bamboo poles remained nearby, seared by the fire but attentive and anxious, for someone had to see whether the coffin would lean to the right side, that is to say in the direction of Luang-Prabang, the residence of the King from whence "the fire" came. With a sudden crackling

149: Reinach--159a G-3 (no date) 1901 AM1 Indochina
Laotians AM8

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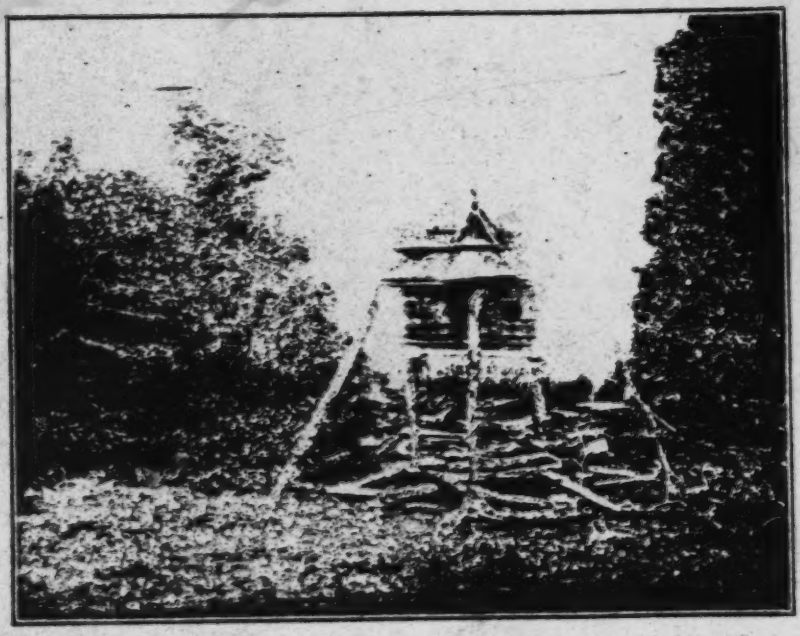

Fig. 53 /p. 212/ A cremation.

149: Reinach--159b G-3 (no date) 1901 AMI Indochina
Laotians AM8

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Fig. 54 /p. 213/ After a cremation.

764 the fire collapsed. In a great shower of sparks, in the middle of a
787 long blue flame, the coffin tottered and fortunately leaned to the right side. The dead man's spirit was satisfied, and it was also an excellent omen for the prosperity of the Muong.

764 [214] Now the pyre, the catafalque, the coffin, the corpse and all were nothing more than an immense live fire, an incandescent mass which projected bizarre flashes on the motley crowd and gave to it, in the evening twilight beside the great river, a phantasmagorical air.

From time to time one of the posts of the canopy could be seen in the center of the fire, rising towards the sky like a gigantic torch. The coffin toppled, and for the space of a second the corpse seemed to appear grimacing and twisting in the middle of the flames, like a salamander.

The whole fire fell in, and the crackling noises lessened. Two or three tongues of flame shot out here and there, only to be extinguished immediately. The coals finished burning themselves out, and soon nothing was left of the pyre and of the whole edifice, so bizarrely decorated, but a pile of gray ashes in the middle of which a few whitish and incompletely burned bone fragments could still be seen. With night the last gleams of the pyre disappeared, the last coals went out and the only light remaining was that of the twinkling stars.

Early the next day the bonzes went to the spot where the pyre had stood. They collected the ashes which had been cooled by dew during the night and then, after throwing a few handfuls to the four winds, they used the rest to draw a crude human face on the ground. The few whitish bones which were still left and which crumbled at the touch were collected and placed in a jar of ordinary earth, which would be buried in the enclosure of a pagoda at the foot of a sacred "ficus."

[565] Later on, since the deceased had been well-to-do and his family was wealthy, the latter would be helped by the people of the province to build a brick pyramid called "That" inside the pagoda enclosure.

A few ashes in an urn and, in some, the memory of a great celebration and a few good meals...and that is all that remained of the man who had long been a great leader in his province.

533 Music. "Instrumental music holds a place of honor in Laos.
534 The instruments are few in number, and are of Malayan and Chinese origin.

586 the Laotians." (Le Laos français.) [Lieutenant-colonel Tournier (Superior Resident in Laos), "Notice sur le Laos français," in Revue Indochinoise, Hanoi, 1900.]

• 764 769 Deaths. Funerals. Everything takes place among the Thais as among the Laotians. The poor are buried, while well-to-do people are cremated in great pomp. Celebrations take place at which animals are sacrificed, there is a great deal to eat and quantities of rice brandy and rice beer are consumed. But here there is ancestor worship, and so the altar of the "Phis" of the house and the body itself receive offerings as long as the funeral feasts last.

After cremation, which, as in India, is practiced on a raised pyre at the bottom of a pit dug in the ground, the ashes and burnt bones are sealed in a jar with a few silver coins placed there to pay for the dead person's food during his wanderings through "space."

The jar is buried on the site of the pyre. Then [237] [Illustration] [238] [Blank page] [239] the mattresses, bolster and pillow of the deceased are placed on top, as well as food and a drinking vase full of water. All of his clothes are fastened to poles planted fan-wise on one side of the tomb. Sometimes a fence closes off the site of the tomb.

In some regions the jar containing the remains and ashes of the deceased is buried in a hidden place in the mountains, known only to the dead person's closest relatives.

This procedure, which is not a ritual one, is doubtless intended to place the mortal remains beyond the reach of any profaners of sepulchres who might be attracted by the temptation of the few coins mixed with the ashes.

Finally, a little house is often built over the tomb which is supposed to represent the dwelling place of the deceased.

527 Games, Celebrations, Festivals. Like their Laotian brothers, the Thais are great lovers of celebrations. The chief holiday, one which is celebrated in May or June every year and during which all work ceases for four days, is that of the dead or Boun-Phi-Tai.

782 769 Animal sacrifices are made to the different genii, and are accompanied by prayers in honor of the dead. The favor of each genie or "Phi" spirit is gained by sacrificing a particular animal, as a dog for the "Phi" of tigers, chickens and pigs for the "Phis" of the mountains, a goat for those which watch over the roads leading to watercourses, and buffalo and oxen, finally, for the "Phis" of the

Tribal Tai

whole match, instead of keeping their legs rigid and remaining on the same line, the opponents turn constantly around a central point and raise each leg in turn, the knee bent. This exercise, in which all four limbs work at once and which requires a sure eye and rapid execution, is surely one of the most graceful in existence when it is performed with the facile ease and supreme elegance of the Lus.

"Lu dancing has that particular character of morbidness which one finds among most Mohammedan peoples and also in Spain. The men (for the men are the ones who dance) imprint on their feet only those movements which are indispensable for making the body pivot and facilitating slow, undulating movements by the hips, torso and arms. The dancers are accompanied by tom-toms and kettledrums, and they sigh out lingering, voluptuous chants which harmonize well with their movements. These are veritable harem dances, or such as dancing girls might perform." (Le Laos français.) [Lieutenant-colonel Tournier (Superior Resident in Laos), "Notice sur le Laos français," in Revue Indochinoise, Hanoi, 1900.]

We have already seen what the religion of the Lus is like, and need add only that their bonzes are highly respected and that the pagodas are much frequented by the children and young people. Thus the number of scholars is higher among the Lus than among the Laotians. Many women even know how to read and write.

The Lus do not cremate their dead, but bury them, even at a very shallow depth, after wrapping the bodies in a mat or a piece of cloth. The bonzes recite a few prayers over the grave when it has been filled, and in return for this service usually receive an object of some value which belonged to the deceased.

[250] The tombs are not kept up.

The Youns. The natives called Youns are Laotians who have settled on the right bank of the Mekong, in the basin of the Upper Menam and in the territories of Xieng-Hai, Xieng-Khong and Xieng-Sen. There are, however, Youns living in French Laos where they have mixed with the other Laotians. [Illustration alongside text here]

The Youns may be distinguished from their fellow Laotians by the extent to which they are tattooed. Whereas a Laotian will only be tattooed from the bend of the knee to the waist, a Youn will be tattooed from the calf of the leg to the chest. This has caused the inhabitants of the right bank to be baptized "Black Bellies" (Lao-Phoung-Dam), while those of the left bank are called Lao-Phoung-Khao or "White Bellies."

Kha

586 and to the family of his accomplice. In a case of flagrante delicto,
684 however, he has the right to kill the guilty parties.

[462] Kha women, when married, are renowned for their austerity, and their conduct is usually exemplary. Moreover, they are very soon disfigured by precocious and repeated childbearing, as well as by the difficult work which they do, and after two or three years of marriage the poor women are no longer tempting to anyone.

•764 Deaths. Cremation is not practiced by the Khas. They bury their dead in as summary a fashion as the Lus, and for a few days bring food to the freshly filled grave. Then the latter is abandoned.

When a chief or a rich man is to be buried, the body is placed in a coffin hewn from a tree trunk.

181 Character. Like all oppressed peoples, the Khas are reserved and timid. They are afraid of innovations and new faces. But in intimate gatherings with their own people they are just as merry and love music, dances, celebrations and festivals just as much as the other peoples of Laos.

535 Music and dancing. They know certain dances imitated from
536 the Lus, pantomimes (1) which resemble the I-Ke of the Burmese,

(1) They also have the habit of performing scenes in pantomime, rather like extremely primitive ballets. We shall describe one such scene:

"A group of girls, guarded by two respectable men, are pursuing the pleasures of dancing. A rogue comes up and tries to make off with one of the girls. After a few unsuccessful attempts he succeeds in eluding the guards' vigilance, jumps forward to seize the girl on whom he has designs, and clasps her in his arms. But his happiness is too much for him and he falls senseless at the feet of the girl he wanted to abduct." (Le Laos français.) - [Lieutenant-colonel Tournier (Superior Resident in Laos), "Notice sur le Laos français," in Revue Indochinoise, Hanoi, 1900.]

and [255] singsong legends in which the r's and k's roll out in terrible
533 fashion. They also have songs which they accompany on flutes, clarinets and single-stringed violins. Some tribes have xylophones, these being instruments composed of bamboo tubes of [Illustration here] different thickness and length, each of which produces a tone varying with its size. It will be seen that by striking with a [256] stick of wood on these tubes, a combination of more or less harmonious sounds will

734 friend take one's place.

Laotians when they pay a visit to a sick person, prattle noisily,
574 ask the sick person a great number of unnecessary questions, and
576 sometimes tell him stories to cheer him up. This custom must stop. The patient, who is tired, needs rest. The visit one pays him should not last longer than ten minutes.

574 Condolence visit.--The Laotian ceremony connected with
576 the condolence visit is the opposite of the Western ceremony. The
764 The visitor, instead of appearing sad before the family of the deceased, is gay and smiling.

In order to give you an idea of what goes on in a house in which a death has taken place among the Laotians, I shall content myself by citing here certain passages from my article, "The custom
764 of funeral ceremonies in the land of Laos" (1): "Those who believe
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1. In Kinnary, No. 4, November, 1946.

in the existence of the phi place a tray of food intended for the deceased near the coffin. Furthermore they place, at the head of the coffin, a sword marked with a cross with chalk, together with a superstitious formula in order to prevent the phi from stealing the coffin away from the deceased. The coffin has to be watched over day and night. The watchers talk, play certain games, or engage in any other diversion. /274/

/825/ "In the course of this watch cats are also prevented from prowling around the coffin. A cat which were to jump across would provoke the resurrection of the dead person, according to what certain people say.

"The house in which the person has died is called heuan di (happy house). There one works, sings, dances, and plays. From it can be heard the sound of orchestras and shouts of joy. Such spectacles have something disconcerting about them to the eyes of strangers. Nevertheless, one should not regard this behavior as a sign of irreverence towards the deceased person. Despite its smiling appearance, the family of the deceased suffers profoundly. It abstains from violent shedding of tears and from public lamentations because it considers a discreet grief more dignified and the sense one has of death in this way a nobler one."

/779/ It would be difficult not to respect this tradition which stems

from the Buddhist religion; but there is reason, in my opinion, for 764
banishing all that is in the domain of superstition. 574

European custom, in contrast, permits the person in mourning 576
not to receive the visitor in the house of the deceased because he is
too afflicted. In this case the visitor leaves a card with a few words 000
of condolence.

If the person in mourning comes to receive the visitor, the latter should assume a sad air and he must not speak of the dead person first. This visit is paid out of sympathy for the family which is in mourning. It should not last too long because grief requires solitude.

Duties of the visitor.--On this subject I advise the adoption of the French custom:

The visitor dresses properly and in a correct manner. If he is wearing a coat and a hat, and carrying an umbrella and a cane, he puts them off before knocking on the door. He greets the lady and the master of the house before the other persons who are present. If the latter are too numerous he is not obligated to shake hands with everybody. It will be enough if he nods his head a couple of times to the right and to the left.

He takes his leave by shaking hands with the lady and the master of the house. In order to salute the other people present he performs the same movements as at his entry. If the number of people present is too large he may skillfully slip away; that is what is called loi vat angkit in Laotian ("to take French leave").

Duties of the host.--Here again my preference is for Western customs:

The host, when he sees his guests coming, appears before them to welcome them. After the exchange of greetings he designates the seats and invites everyone to sit down. When everybody is seated, somebody enters; he extends his hand and everybody rises to greet him. A lady does not get up to return the greeting except in the case of a personage of /975/ note or of a venerable old man.

The hostess and the host must appear affable and smiling during the whole time of the reception. When somebody takes his leave they accompany him to the door.

At a gathering.--At a gathering it is the duty of everyone to

585 In front of the bride's house, guards make a sham defence of the gate of the house. The husband and his retinue can enter only by making a gift of money or alcohol. When he reaches the stairway of the house, the young man may only climb it after having his feet washed on a piece of stone covered with a banana leaf by the sisters or the women servants of the bride. He must pay for this service, then seat himself in front of the two ritual phakhouan next to his bride, who is already sitting there. The Sou Khouan of the wedding resembles the bassi. However at the wedding there are only two phakhouan and everything in the ceremony must be in even numbers. They are, however, larger and better decorated than the ordinary phakhouan. The marriage is celebrated by two individuals officiating who recite sacramental formulas in duet. Then, after tying a large number of cotton threads around their wrists, the married couple prostrate themselves before each of the aged people and those who are present. They are then led to their room by a lady chosen from among the most virtuous.

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Funerals

764 In Laos as in all Buddhist countries, the dead are burned. However, a distinction is made between two kinds of death, normal death and accidental (drowning, suicide or violent death). The dead of the second category must be buried within twenty-four hours. The story is told of a peasant's wife who, having died in childbirth, was quickly cut up in pieces by the villagers who scattered them to the four winds so that she would not become a wandering soul capable of tormenting the living.

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[58] When there is a death in a house, the body is bathed with tepid water, then with cold water. It is then perfumed and dressed. Two garments are put on it, one wrong side out, the other right side out. The former symbolizes death, the latter life, for the favorite garment of the dead person while alive was chosen. His hair is then combed and he is shackled with a white cotton thread, for he must not return to the world of the living. The same thread is used to wrap around his neck, to tie his two hands together, and his two feet together. This bond must not be cut, so a knot is made at each place where it is attached. This thread also shows man how illusory are the bonds which tie him to the world. Then the body is wrapped in a shroud. It is laid parallel with the largest dimension of the house, as opposed to the living who always lie in the direction of its width.

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Finally a silver or gold coin is placed in its mouth and he is told that earthly goods are vain and that this little thing that is pushed with difficulty between his teeth is all that the dead can take with him to the tomb. Here we find an ancient belief which the Catapatha Brahmana mentions: gold is placed in the mouths of the dead because this metal is immortal and in this way immortality can be attained. This custom is found not only in classical antiquity, but also in Japan, and China, and in the major part of eastern Asia. 764 ●

After the body is put in its coffin, the latter is set on banana trunks, for as this wood has no core, so man from now on has no substance. The house has become heuan di, the happy house. The bonzes come and recite prayers over the dead which tell of the vanity of life. 764 761

"The body which the soul has left is nothing. Soon it will be as useless on earth as a dead tree.

/59/ "Life is an ephemeral thing. Birth and death follow each other without cease according to a normal ritual. After being born, one must disappear. Happiness is to enter Nirvana."

During the entire vigil (ngan) boys and girls are together; they sing, dance, drink, play. However in a corner near the bier is placed a tray filled with food for the departed. 764

The dead body may be kept indefinitely at the house; there is no law which forbids it. However at the present time the tendency is more and more to follow the western method. In the country, seven days after his death, the deceased is carried into a cabin erected for him in a corner of his rice field. Every day his widow and children come and keep his temporary mausoleum in good order. Every week, on the 8th, 14th and 15th days of the crescent or waning moon, they repeat their offerings to the bonzes until the fourth month, the usual date for the ceremonies marking the dry season and the work in the rice fields which has just been completed. Then an enormous pavilion is built, and under its roof work is started on erecting the men (cenotaph) and decorating it as well as the coffin. Before this work starts, the coffin has been open and the dead man's face has been washed with coconut water, symbol of purity.

The style of the coffin and the men varies according to the locality. Its decoration also varies, but often consists only of sheets of gold paper stuck onto lacquer and representing vegetable motifs, flowers and deities. In important burials, the coffin is mounted on two enormous birds drawn by means of white cotton cord by the people present. This is done less and less, especially at Vientiane where the

764 coffin is placed on a truck. The bonzes are at the head of the procession, then the widow and the children dressed in white as a sign of mourning.

[60] The coffin is placed on the pyre. All those attending, holding a lighted candle or resinous torch, go to the pyre in single file, and throw the brands into the fire. It is forbidden to light a torch by lending one's light or by borrowing that of a neighbor. During this time the family must throw offerings to the crowd: pieces of banana branches, lemons, etc., into which have been introduced coins mixed with grilled rice. The cotton thread, called fay mongkhou, which [751] had surrounded the house in order to chase away sorrow, illness, the phi, etc., is removed at the end of the ceremony.

On the third day the bones are fetched away. The bonzes are [187] invited, but before touching the ashes, they must be examined to see [775] if they have left any imprints either animal or human, in order to know in what form the dead man will be reborn. The bones are gathered with wooden pincers and then placed in an urn. A statue in a vaguely human form is erected of wet cinders. The urn and the offerings are surrounded by a cotton thread, then the bonzes recite a prayer and this closes the ceremony. The urn will be placed in a pagoda or buried by the family who will erect a that. A little later, to commemorate the death of the departed, the family will dig a hole in the pagoda or near the that, and in it plant a long bamboo at the end of which is fastened a cotton banner laminated with small bamboo sticks. A tray of offerings is brought, which had been placed at the foot of the bamboo pole while it was being set up, and which is held by the relatives and friends of the dead man. Before this, offerings of food had been wrapped in a banana leaf. Once the bamboo is set up, water is poured all around on the earth which is holding it up, in the hope that the merits of this action will reach the other world. Then the whole family [61] squats down around the pole and with joined hands recites prayers.

The Laotian House.

342 It is built on piles and has a veranda. The roof is curved slightly inwards. A long stake holding the water jar is sunk in the ground near the veranda outside the house. The floor is of bamboo or of thin wide boards. The wall and ceiling are of bamboo panels, or of boards, or of mud. There are two principal doors and few windows. A partition going from the inner beam of the front gable separates the house lengthwise in two parts, most often of equal size. One is divided into